

Angola: Charges Prompt

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LUSAKA, Zambia—John Stockwell's charge of gross bungling by the Central Intelligence Agency during the 1975 Angolan civil war serves to lift the veil on a still largely unwritten story of that conflict.

The entire Zaire-based, Western-backed operation on behalf of one of the three factions fighting for supremacy in Angola was engulfed in corruption, incompetence and misjudgments, but there were only hints of this at the time.

When the whole picture is finally put together, with the CIA's misadventure in true perspective, it is likely that the blame will fall as heavily on Zaire and the Western-backed Na-

News Analysis

tional Front for the Liberation of Angola as on the CIA.

Stockwell, among other allegations, accused Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko of pocketing \$1.4 million in CIA funds.

It was widely rumored but only occasionally documented during the war that American funds and arms destined for the National Front were being siphoned off all along the pipeline by Zairian army officers and civilian authorities as well as the Front's own ineffectual leadership.

Probably the most frequently asked question among Western correspondents covering the war was, "What happened to the \$25 million the CIA was supposed to have funneled via Zaire to its allies?"

It was simply impossible to believe that even half that amount, or its equivalent in arms, was reaching the National Front and the other pro-Western faction, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

Compared to the Soviet- and Cuban-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the two Western-backed groups were always poorly armed, fighting with a hodgepodge of Western and Eastern arms. The National Union, based in southern Angola, was chronically short of arms and had far more recruits than weapons as defeat approached in March 1976.

As for the former CIA official's contention that the agency was responsible for the massive Soviet and Cuban intervention in Angola, it seems just as likely, that the decisive factor was South Africa.

New Look at

U.S. Role

It was the clear impression of most correspondents attending Angola's independence celebrations in November 1975 that the overwhelming preoccupation of the Soviet-backed ruling faction was the incredibly swift advance of two South African-led military columns. Starting in mid-October, they had traveled nearly 2,000 miles from the Namibian border to within 60 miles of Luanda, the capital.

South Africa gave Moscow and Havana all the moral justification they needed in Africa for their intervention.

Furthermore, Cuban and Soviet military backing for the Popular Movement dated back years before the civil war to the Angolan group's long and largely unsuccessful struggle against the Portuguese colonial power. The sending of huge amounts of Soviet arms and thousands of Cuban troops was only a quantitative leap in those countries' longstanding commitment to the Popular Movement — as was the escalation of CIA arms and funds for the National Front.

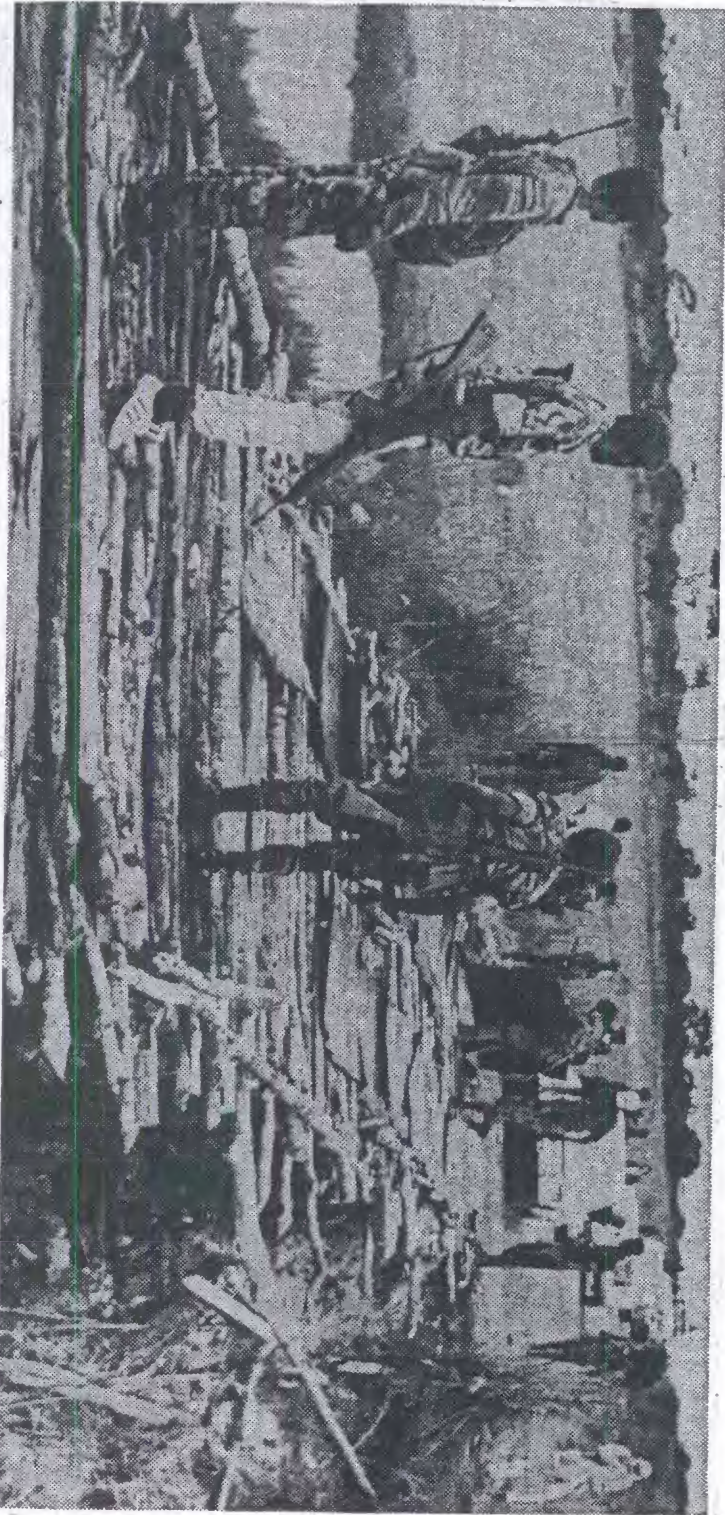
Perhaps the biggest difference between the American and Soviet in-

volvements was that while Moscow had hundreds of Cubans to make sure its arms were used effectively, Washington had only a few dozen advisers and liaison officers and a greedy intermediary to deal with before its weapons got to the battlefield.

As for Stockwell's charges that the CIA masterminded the information campaigns of UNITA and the National Front, there was never any doubt in the minds of most Western correspondents covering the war that they were not being told the entire truth by any of the factions, including the Popular Movement.

The Western-backed National Front was notoriously bad in its dealings with the press and even UNITA's record of half truths and lies about how the war was going caught up with it. When Western correspondents did get close to the war front, they told what they saw and heard, often to the consternation of the National Front and UNITA.

Neither Holden Roberto, the National Front's leader, nor UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, could understand why the Western press some-



Soldiers of UNITA cross a makeshift bridge near Gago Coutinho in southern Angola in January, 1976, as they waged war with a Soviet-backed nationalist faction.

Associated Press

times was so hostile toward them and both spoke their minds on this issue during the special summit of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa in early 1978.

It was actually Western correspondents traveling with Savimbi in southern Angola who provided the first credible evidence of the South African involvement with UNITA, evidence that seriously undermined Savimbi's credibility in Africa. It was also Western correspondents who reported the arrival of white mercenaries in Kinshasa and then reported their criminal activities in northern Angola that proved so damaging to the National Front's image.

UNITA reports of captured Soviet and Cuban advisers that Stockwell says were a CIA plant were reported for what they were—unverifiable claims. In the same fashion, Popular movement reports of South Africa involvement in southern Angola were carried by all Western agencies and newspapers long before they could be confirmed by eyewitness accounts.

Whether or not CIA tried to mislead the Western press at any given

moment, the defeats and failings of the National Front and UNITA were too obvious to cover up and were reported in as much detail as Western reporters could verify. But it was for the most part a war whose front lines remained largely off limits to the press, making it extremely difficult for reporters to know precisely what was happening and making it possible for all three Angolan factions to mislead them at least temporarily.

Probably the main error of the CIA and the rest of Washington was their political judgment that the National Front was the faction most worth backing in the Angolan nationalist struggle for power.

History is likely to show that, like the Chinese and even North Koreans who also got involved in the war on the National Front's side, the Americans were captive of their alliance with Mobutu. What he wanted, he too often got without question.

Not until the Zairian leader realized late in the summer of 1975 that the National Front was a losing cause and swung his support to UNITA did American assistance also seem to begin shifting to the other pro-Western faction.

The National Front, operating mainly in the north, depended almost entirely for its heavy arms, such as artillery and armored cars, on Zaire and South Africa. One reason the National Front crumbled so quickly before the Cuban-backed Popular Movement's assault in early 1976 was that the Zairians pulled out all of their military equipment leaving their Angolan ally with only small arms to deal with tanks and rockets.

Another reason was that Zairian officers serving in northern Angola or

in National Front camps in Zaire stole and resold large quantities of American arms earmarked for the National Front. One French photographer told me he watched Zairian officers and National Front soldiers at the Negage airfield in northern Angola fighting over a plane load of U.S. arms that had just arrived. The Zairians, he said, got most of them.

Middle echelon National Front officials complained bitterly in private to some Western correspondents that the Zairian Army was sabotaging their war effort and taking their arms. They said they were afraid to make the accusation public because Zaire was their faction's main base of operations and they could not afford a rift with Mobutu.

The National Front was a seemingly hopeless organization once it went beyond guerrilla operations to more conventional warfare. This was largely due to Roberto, its leader, who was a prosperous businessman in Kinshasa with a distant family link and a close

political relationship to Mobutu.

All outsiders — the South Africans, Portuguese and Americans — complained repeatedly about Roberto's refusal to take their advice and his disastrous attempt to act as commander-in-chief when he had no direct combat experience.

It seemed that neither the CIA, his own Portuguese chief-of-staff nor his South African advisers had much influence over Roberto.

The South Africans were particularly critical of Roberto in their official account of their involvement, released in February 1977. They said he had "thrown to the winds" their advice not to try to launch an offensive to seize Luanda just before independence.

Among Roberto's other mistakes, according to a wide variety of Western sources at the time, was his refusal to bring in large numbers of mercenaries to bolster his forces until it was too late.

Adding to the CIA's difficulties was the state of Washington's relations with Mobutu in the summer of 1975 and the Zairian practice of mixing public and private funds.

It is perhaps forgotten now that in mid-June 1975, Mobutu publicly accused the United States of "financing and directing" a coup attempt against him and shortly afterward expelled the U.S. ambassador, Deane Hinton, who had been pressing Mobutu to adopt better financial practices.

It seems highly unlikely that the reason the CIA did not make an issue over Mobutu's alleged pocketing of \$1.4 million of its Angola war funds was that it feared he might go public. After all, what African president wants it to be known the CIA is providing him with funds?

The likelier explanation for the CIA's silence in the matter was that Washington was desperately trying to mend its relations with the Zairian president, who apparently really did have suspicions that the Americans were out to get him. It was obviously no time to complain about the disappearance of a million dollars when the whole American position in Zaire was at stake.